

FINAL REPORT

PIG00003

Partners in Grain

PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT CODE: PIG00003

PROJECT TITLE: PARTNERS IN GRAIN

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Summary

Partners in Grain (PinG) is an established highly successful national network identifying and ensuring access to and delivery of professional development opportunities to grain growers.

PinG has a strong focus on young grain growers and partners in farming businesses and recognises that these two groups are integral to the success of farming businesses but are often not present at mainstream delivery of programs.

Part-time coordinators, supported by state based volunteer Reference Groups, guide the program. Coordinators function as learning brokers to ensure the professional development opportunities provided meet the needs of the target audience.

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Conclusions

PinG has developed an important role in the delivery of professional development of all members of the grain producing business. While continuing to focus on partners and young people, the training offered has broadened to include all members of the farming business in some states.

The success of this project is largely due to the great number of volunteer hours donated by the Reference Group members. This needs to be closely monitored as volunteer 'burnout' is a real risk for PinG.

The project has also increased its linkage with grower groups and other projects. For example, PinG in Victoria (VIC) is working with the BestWool BestLamb project delivering to all members of the farming business at Laanecoorie. In South Australia (SA), a PinG group is working with the SheepPlus project which is funded by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI). PinG aims to build on this into the future increasing links with grower groups and potentially other research and development corporations (RDCs) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).

Through a trial of e-learning using on-line conference rooms in Queensland (QLD), PinG has identified the need to increase opportunities for on-line delivery of training. A component of the new strategic plan will be done in each state trialling a new technology for delivery. This may be via the Reference Group or other participants. These trials will be reported back to the National Reference Group so as to determine the advantages and disadvantages as well as the most appropriate ways to use these methods.

The Training Needs Analyses have highlighted the importance of training in marketing, business and financial management and people management including succession planning. PinG will focus on these training needs in the next project as well as reacting to the immediate needs as identified by state Reference Group members.

A more formal communications plan, including a webpage, will be developed for use in the next project. This will ensure PinG markets itself effectively and is more accessible to the general farming community.

The core strategies for the next project will be:

Facilitation of professional development activities for farming businesses. This will be achieved through

1. Delivery of demand-driven, flexible and innovative programs.
2. Developing collaborative partnerships.
3. Building networks and fostering relationships.
4. Targeted communication.

Recommendations

It is recommended that GRDC utilises the PinG network and training brokerage service to assist with its future capacity building and business management strategies. PinG provides a great network to deliver information, and is also very useful in gathering 'needs' based information.

PinG can provide a vital link with the formal training sector, especially the AgriFoods Skills Council (AFISC) and the TAFEs in each state. It is seen as important that GRDC develops links with AFISC to ensure it is aware of the needs of industry and therefore funds allocated to the training sector are used to enhance the grains industry especially in areas of technological and agronomic advancement and business planning.

PinG will continue to develop strong links with grower groups, and the many organisations which are providing capacity building to the agricultural sector including the Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women and the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Further links with organisations providing extension including the Departments of Agriculture need to be maintained and built upon.

PinG is aware of the range of delivery needs of growers. For example, some growers are very technologically 'savvy', while others are making little if any use of technology e.g. many headers have yield monitors which are not being used. Yield Prophet® and Plan to Profit are both tools which can assist growers make more informed choices. Workshops and training are required to assist growers develop skills in these new technologies.

The work of PinG in using effective communication networks such as email in the loop groups, personal support and encouragement through mentoring, is acknowledged as having been and continuing to be a very important component of capacity building in the grains industry.

Ongoing funding from GRDC to maintain the database will ensure quantifiable data are available to evaluate the project.

Funding to effectively evaluate the project in this, its third funding cycle, would greatly assist in determining the on-going need for such an organisation to be funded in the grains industry to ensure capacity building activities are offered locally on a needs basis.

Volunteer contribution needs to be monitored and managed to ensure 'burnout' does not occur.

Outcomes

Benefits to participants

1. Participation in and acknowledgement of young people and partners through increasing relevant skills and technical knowledge.
2. Belonging to a social and professional network through a supportive grower-driven, group learning process across and within the grain growing states.
3. Access to professional development activities through face-to-face workshops, on-line learning using webinars, networking and sponsorship to attend conferences.
4. An increase in the number of young people and partners involved in leadership positions within the industry and their communities.

Benefits to the grains industry

1. The identification of programs which increase skills levels and hence the representation of young people and partners in decision-making processes.
2. The transfer of new knowledge through the increased utilisation and acknowledgement of all stakeholders in the grains industry.
3. Increased understanding of the barriers which have prevented young people and partners' active contribution to the industry.
4. Strategies to increase the number of young people and partners on committees and in leadership positions in the industry.
5. Over 10,000 hours of professional development delivered to members of the grains industry each year for three years.
6. Training needs research for members of the grains industry has been completed in QLD, SA, VIC and Western Australia (WA).

7. Establishment of networks and links with grower groups across the grain producing states thereby increasing access to professional development activities, young people and partners.
8. Reference Groups have developed training databases of suitable trainers and programs.

To support the National PinG project, GRDC funded a PhD scholarship. The recipient, Pat Hamilton, completed her thesis this year and was awarded her PhD by Charles Sturt University (CSU). The three examiners' reports (USA, London and WA) acknowledged the research, (which drew on the experiences of the national and state Reference Groups, senior male grains industry leaders and a group of 12 SA women who developed their skills by attending a year long training project) as an important contribution to the future of agricultural industries both in Australia and other countries. An exploration of the training activities offered by the social and professional networks of the PinG project illustrates the empowering nature of business management and personal development activities for all members of the farming partnership.

The findings of the PhD highlighted how the acceptance and incorporation of young people and women's experiences, skills and knowledge might increase the productivity and sustainability of family farming businesses in Australia.

Achievements/Benefits

Professional Development

1. Well over 5,000 hours of training delivered each year across the grain producing states of Australia.
2. Training has been offered at all levels with delivery being offered from introductory sessions to advanced.
3. Training in supply chains through Beer Appreciation Dinners has been very successful at attracting young people.
4. Training Needs Analyses carried out in WA, SA and VIC with support from Farmbis funding. QLD funded the research itself.
5. SA secured three years of funding from the National Landcare Program (NLP) to deliver Risk Awareness workshops with a focus on environmental management.
6. Governance training has been provided to NSW Reference Group members providing skills to benefit not only PinG but also their local communities and the grains industry.
7. In response to the drought, NSW coordinated 'Dollars and Sense' workshops to provide information to assist growers in managing the year ahead.
8. On-farm storage workshops were very successful in NSW with a DVD being produced and made available to growers who were unable to attend.
9. WA facilitated 'Are you suffering from office meltdown' where participants gained skills in effectively running a farm office.
10. QLD has focused on training using technology with Learning Circles - Leadership courses offered by teleconference being very well received. This has also led to the Reference Group being involved with a Farmbis Targeted Initiative project where an on-line conference room has been available to deliver webinars.

Sponsorship

A sponsorship agreement with the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) Ltd for the three years of the project has funded the management of the national project as well as the annual national face-to-face meetings.

New Faces in New Places in the grains industry

Many members of PinG have taken on other leadership positions within their local communities or within the grains industry. A few examples of these are Merna Curnow on the GRDC Southern Panel, Linda Eldredge on the South Australian Grains Industry Trust (SAGIT), Jeanette Long Chair of Ag Excellence Alliance in SA and Board member of Australian Women in Agriculture, Pam Kreig was awarded the GRDC Corporate Governance scholarship to undertake the Australian Institute of Company Directors Course. Mandy Strong from NSW was appointed to the AWB Grower Consultative Group.

Media

PinG places a regular article in the Australian Grain magazine.

Articles are submitted to local and state media. Local radio is also used to promote events and to follow up on successes. At the recent face-to-face meeting in Adelaide, it was agreed that PinG would establish a standalone website which is now under development.

Networks

Links forged with grower groups and other projects.

Two funding applications were submitted to DAFF (non government organisation (NGO) grants for women and young people and Women's Initiative Grant). Both were shortlisted but unsuccessful due to insufficient funds. An E-concept application was submitted to GRDC for Learning Circles, however this was also unsuccessful.

PinG is currently working with the Grains Industry Training Network (GITN) with an application to DAFF for an Action Partnerships Grant.

QLD: Has appointed a new coordinator, Theresa Kunde, who comes to PinG with experience in facilitation in the dairy industry. A new Reference Group is also operating successfully in QLD with a face-to-face meeting in June to create an action plan for the new project.

NSW: With Farmbis funding not being available in NSW for the past three years, the NSW Reference Group has worked extremely well at establishing networks and attracting funding for their events. It has linked with BestWool, Single Vision Aust, AWB Ltd, Lachlan Catchment Management Authority and NSW Farmers Association. These links have enabled the Reference Group to offer over 20 different activities to 1,358 participants.

VIC and TAS: The Reference Group has focused its activities in working with the BestWool BestLamb Healthy Soils Project in partnership with the Mid Loddon Landcare Group as well as undertaking a situational analysis funded by Farmbis to analyse the training needs of grain growers in VIC.

SA: Has become a member of the Ag Excellence Alliance and delivered at its forum during the past three years. Members sit on this committee. On-going groups have been established at Bute and Hilltown. These groups are undertaking training in topics varying from crop agronomy to business planning. There have been two trips to the Waite Institute with members of family businesses participating.

WA: Works closely with the WA Alliance and regional grower groups. It assists with Women's Field Days and sponsors members to attend conferences such as the Controlled Traffic Conference.